

## Postscripts by Jack Post

Right from the beginning of our recorded history, Duxbury people have been builders, sometimes because they had to, sometimes to make money, sometimes for the fun of it. Houses they put up when they needed them, simple shelters at first, which became more imposing as the citizens prospered. Boats they built also, first to trade along the coast as far down as Maine for furs and fish; later to sail the oceans of the globe, to the Indies for rum, to far Cathay for spices or rare porcelain. But whatever the times, come fall a certain proportion of the men of Duxbury would turn their ingenuity and their builders' skills to the serious business of luring the great flocks of ducks and geese winging down from the north into the range of their muskets, their fowling pieces or their automatic shotguns.

All along the shore at places called Goose Point or Duck Hill or Brant Rock are almost obliterated evidences of pot holes or blinds that saw activity a generation or so past, some elaborate layouts with a comfortable cabin nestling in the woods and connected to the gunning stand by runways ingeniously concealed with branches and marsh grass; others just holes scooped out of the sod, where a barrel could be sunk, and a lone hunter could squat while the northeast rain drove down the gap between his cap and his collar.

Wherever he set out his blocks or staked his live decoys, the old time gunner must have a boat to retrieve his kill, and often to ferry him home to the mainland. Many preferred to shoot out in the bay from a floating platform known as a sink box, just big enough for one man, set with no more than an inch or two of freeboard above the water, camouflaged with grass, and surrounded with bobbing decoys to lure in the passing flocks. More lethal was the sneak boat used by market gunners of a century ago, which was no less than a bouyant gun deck, very low in silhouette, mounting a small cannon of two or three inches bore ramrodded full of black powder and a canister of bird shot. Lying flat, a gunner would scull his deadly island downwind onto a raft of ducks, and kill scores with a single blast. All these boats and boxes were built to suit the whim of the builder.

With the proliferation of man since those days came steady usurpation for his purposes of the duck marshes, and everywhere pollution of the wild habitat, which cut the duck population far more than all the gunners combined. But gunner had turned sportsman when the birds were no longer important as food, and voluntarily limited himself to a reasonable number of birds per required license. Then he undertook to improve the distant Canadian breeding grounds for waterfowl, crossing international borders with a conservationist group called Ducks Unlimited that has saved waterfowl from approaching doom and helped them back along the road toward their former abundance.

Now in Duxbury, and indeed down all the great flyways across North America, waterfowl by increasing thousands wing south each fall, and the hunters, in spite of small limits, just as eagerly prepare duck boats with just as much individual attention as their fathers. Some prefer to gun alone, some with dogs, some with other men and dogs, but each with a set-up to suit himself. Every boat must be disguised, every blind grassed, which adds up to much work for two or three ducks apiece. This compulsion to rise from a comfortable bed before dawn for the privilege of nearly freezing to death in a salt marsh brings great satisfaction with its discomforts. How else can you hear the whir of unseen wings overhead before dawn, or a few minutes later silhouette a duck against the glow in the east just as it sets its wings to wheel toward your decoys? You become a man again, in the open, matching wits with the wild.